

The Acousmatic Situation in Digital Games

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores acousmatic experiences in digital games. Understood by Schaeffer as “a sound that one hears without seeing what causes it” (1966), the acousmatic has been analyzed in relations to a number of different cases (Kane, 2014), but remains understudied in digital game studies.

Thanks to the extensive use of spatialized mixing techniques, the virtual environments of digital games are a contemporary venue for acousmatic situations. Sound designers consistently use “3D audio [...] to localize the sound behind the player, [allowing] to focus simultaneously on the fore and aft perspective” (Miller, 1999), thus generating potential for acousmatic listening experiences.

This paper addresses the localization of sound in a virtual acoustic space experienced in a virtual environment through a discussion of acousmatic situations and modes of listening (Collins, 2013). Examples of digital games with acousmate sound, defined as “sound that one imagines hearing” (Kane, 2014), are also introduced.

This paper is contextualized within the Schaefferian tradition and the writings of Film theorist Michel Chion. Acousmatic situations are presented as a frequent occurrence in player’s experiences, providing an original theoretical perspective to the study of sounds in virtual environments.

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Luca Spiteri Monsigneur is a Masters student at the Institute of Digital Games, University of Malta. His research interests include immersion through sound, acoustic environments in games and audio production techniques.

Costantino Oliva is an Assistant Lecturer at the Institute of Digital Games, University of Malta, where he teaches digital game analysis and design. His research interests include musicology of digital games, soundscape studies, and media studies, with a focus on the musical performances of digital game players. He has published about these subjects in conferences such as Philosophy of Computer Games, Ludomusicology, Replaying Japan, and the Society for Cinema & Media Studies Conference.

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